

# **GENDER AND RELIGION IN THE PHOENIX**

by

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## **Gender and Religion in *The Phoenix***

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 The Manuscript and Poem

*The Phoenix* is a ninth-century poem in Old English depicting the life, death and resurrection of the mythical phoenix bird, complete with a religious commentary at the end. The authorship of the poem has been the subject of many critical works, with the poem being ascribed to Cynewulf by some critics based on the lexis. Many have objected to this theory, therefore this thesis will view the poem as a work by an unknown author; however, *The Phoenix* is still the work of a writer who had comparable skills and rhetorical abilities to those of the famous author of *Elene*. The poem is based on the Latin *De Ave Phoenice* by Lactantius (1965), and shows familiarity with Ambrose's *Hexameron* (1961).

The poem opens with a detailed description of the Paradise landscape, which is the Phoenix's abode, followed by a description of the old, grey Phoenix. The poem then moves on to depict the Phoenix interacting with Paradise in a series of activities, including bathing twelve times in a brook or fountain and singing to the sun prior to its flight into the earthly land of men. Once in flight from Paradise, the old Phoenix then collects a range of spices and herbs and builds its nest / pyre. The burning of the old Phoenix then takes place with the new Phoenix being reborn from the ashes, in the metamorphosing sequences of an apple, a worm, a small eagle and finally a young, colourful Phoenix. The young bird grows up in the human world before gathering the remains of its predecessor in a ceremonial return to Paradise, accompanied on the way by a cluster of birds described as thanes; it carries and buries the remains. This life

cycle of the Phoenix, we are informed, will inevitably recur, giving the Phoenix eternal life. After the narrative of the Phoenix's life cycle the poem moves into a commentary on the allegorical narrative of the mythical bird, directly reflecting on the tropological reading of the poem and concentrating on the creation of man as well as the biblical account of Christ's resurrection.

The commentary starts by recounting the Phoenix's life cycle, showing the Phoenix's nature and gender to be a mystery known only to God. The poet then likens the Phoenix to each of the blessed souls, who endure exile to find life to become servants of God. The poem moves on to why such exile is needed with a short account of man's fall from the Garden of Eden and the wrath they faced from God. Through the image of Eden the poet reflects Paradise and the land to where souls will ascend in their release from the body. We see the separation of the soul and the body through death in the corporeal world and the poet informs us that they will be reconciled on Judgement Day, where both body and soul as one entity will be living in glory with adornments. Finally the Phoenix resurrection is likened to that of Christ's and the resurrection of man's corporeal state on Judgement Day, thereby linking them together. The poem ends addressing God, giving praise as is traditional with Christian works in the Anglo-Saxon period and can be seen in such other poetry as *Elene* (Cook, 1919, p.46), which ends -- after a dedication to Christ -- with a traditional 'Amen'.

The symbolism openly conveys the resurrection of Christ leading to the salvation of mankind, depicting their entrance into Heaven. However, the poem also contains multiple layers of tropological, typological, anagogical and allegorical imagery and

symbolism. St Augustine of Hippo suggested that ‘the sheer difficulty of a work of literature made it more valuable’ (Brown, 1967, p. 260) and that it was through ‘allegorical interpretation by which he [a religious individual] extracted such profound meanings’ (Brown, 1967, p. 260). This complexity appealed to Anglo-Saxon writers and readers and this poem can be understood on many separate levels of interpretation, not only as a depiction of man’s salvation, but also as a didactic text informing the reader of how to gain entrance into Heaven.

In the tropological interpretation of the poem there are links to the harrowing of hell. Viewing the poem through this interpretative lens allows the reader to further access its typological message. This view suggests that the unification of the genders within the soul represents an individual’s salvation as it returns to a state for which man’s soul was intended, pre-creation and pre-fall. This concept of the unified genders has Biblical authority. As stated in Genesis, ‘et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam ad imaginem Dei creavit illum masculum et feminam creavit eos’<sup>1</sup>(Genesis 1: 27, 2004). Male and female were made in the image of God and therefore both sexes possess abstract attributes, which have been modelled upon God. This thesis will concentrate on this concept, looking at the unification of the male and female attributes and identifying them within the symbolic soul.

The ideas about Judgement Day, which also accompany the Genesis symbolism as influenced by Ambrose’s *Hexameron*, complete the poem’s biblical content. Through its didactic element, the poem can be seen to comment on the preparation of the soul for the correct state by which salvation can occur. This duality of the allegorical and

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<sup>1</sup> ‘So God created Human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.’

didactic readings within the poem can account for some critics reading *The Phoenix* as having a ‘kaleidoscopic’ nature, in which both the redeemer and the redeemed are identified through the same symbolism (Calder, 1972, p. 168). The poem has an interlaced structure in which the redeemed and redeemer are explicitly linked, where the former systematically imitates the latter in order to gain salvation.

The writer of *The Phoenix* has incorporated a multi-layered Christian theology into the symbolism of the Phoenix, contained in its life cycle and its rituals. The Holy Trinity, as well as Mariology and Judgement Day, are all poignant aspects of this theology within the poem. The Nicene Creeds of the fourth century show the start of many discussions on Mariology and her status as *theotokos*, including discussions on the Holy Spirit and the nature of the Trinity. Such theology is presented within the poem through the typological, tropological, and allegorical layers of meaning. These readings, although not the subject of this thesis, are inseparable from it and therefore will feature within the analysis of the unification of genders within the Christian soul. These features are specific to ninth century Old English poems in their reoccurring presence within the literature such as in the *Dream of the Rood* (Treharne, 2000, p. 46) or in the *Gospel of Pseudo- Matthew* (Clayton, 1998, p. 150).

## 1.2 Critical Overview of the Poem

Since *The Phoenix* has long been ‘recognised as being derived’ from Lactantius’s *Ave De Phoenice* (Cook, 1919, p. xxviii), much criticism has been focused on the poem’s change of religious intent from its original. The poem’s alteration of the mythical bird’s gender highlights one of many subtle changes within the poem. *The Phoenix* is

accepted widely as a poem depicting the resurrection of Christ. Acknowledgement of Christian interpretation must, however, be tempered with alternative symbolic modes contained throughout its allegorical narrative. Work has been done on both the figure of the Phoenix and Paradise, noting the Christian importance of the specific images, such as the apple, worm, eagle, resurrection, and bathing. David Clark in his book *Medieval Men* (2009) makes an intriguing suggestion, questioning the naturalness or unnatural aspects of the Phoenix and its habitat, expanding on what Calder (1972) notes about the ornamental nature encapsulated within Paradise.

*The Phoenix* has also been analysed from an anthropological viewpoint by Heffernan (1988) in an intriguing interpretation in which tribal initiation rituals and ceremonies account for much of the symbolism, with the feminine as a dominant factor in the symbolism contained within the poem. The Phoenix is portrayed as being a symbol to which many symbolic figures can be attached, and critics have found this to be problematic in the interpretation of the poem. In viewing the Phoenix as a soul this thesis will bring together such previous works in a way which allows for all aspects of the Christian interpretations to apply and to be focused on a fixed message within the poem; the understanding of the soul, in relation to the corporeal and the divine, in the unification of the genders.

### **1.3 Sources of *The Phoenix***

This thesis will focus upon the religious concept of the soul within the poem. It will specifically address the poem's didactic message concerning the unification of the genders within the Christian soul in order to reflect God's image and become closer to

the divine. The poem's comments upon the soul will be looked at through the teachings of Augustine and through him, the classical views of Plato and Plotinus, Origen and Ambrose; specifically, it will deal with Augustine's inward turn of the soul, the pre-creative state of the soul, as well as Origen and Ambrose's concepts of the soul. Within the poem the Phoenix is the embodiment of the masculine aspects of the soul with Paradise being the personification of the abstract female elements. The two gendered parts of the soul merge through the interactions that take place between the Phoenix and its Paradise in order to produce the new Phoenix. This can be viewed as embodying the two genders and becoming, finally, an androgynous figure. (Due to its personification within the poem as the female element, Paradise will be identified using a capital letter. Phoenix will be identified as a capital letter except where referring to the Phoenix outside the context of the poem.)

The thesis will refer to Cook's (1919) transcription of *The Phoenix* taken from the Exeter Manuscript. It will also use facsimiles of the manuscript in both electronic and photograph versions. It will draw upon a range of translations most notably those of S. A. J. Bradley (1995) and F. Blake (1919), as well as using my own translation of *The Phoenix*. All other primary reading materials have their source information in the footnotes. Line numbers for primary sources will be included within the text, with translations found in the footnotes.

The thesis will focus on the interpretation of the poem, assuming the poet's almost certain knowledge of the influential authors and major religious figures of St. Augustine and St. Ambrose and through them classical writers and philosophers such as Plato. These classical and Christian philosophers in this Thesis are seen as being

linked together in their work and theorizing on creation, death and the soul. These authors differ from each other in specific ways: the philosophy of the classical writers proclaims a cosmos in which a universal link between all matter exists. The Christian philosophers, however, are limited to viewing the existence of the soul and creation within the sphere of Christianity. Yet for all their differences, these classical and Christian figures also have a certain correlation of concepts running throughout their work; one of these correlations is found in the nature and immortality of the soul.

*The Phoenix*, noted for its likeness to *De Ave Pheonice* and to Ambrose's *Hexameron* in its depiction of the mythical bird, has an abundance of sources from the earlier Anglo-Saxon period. Ambrose's *Hexameron* (1961) is extant in Old English and therefore shows that Ambrose's works were certainly circulating in the period and would have been accessible to the *Phoenix* poet. Augustine of Hippo, the fourth-century bishop and writer, and a student of Ambrose is renowned for shaping western Christianity as well as writing major influential texts. Augustine's teachings – amongst them *Genesis* (1982a) *Hexameron* (1953) *De Trinitate* (1953) and *The City of God* (1963) -- would have been available to men of a certain stature: literate in a religious environment. Much of the poem's religious content can be seen to come directly from certain works of Augustine and by the ninth century, when the poem was being composed, Augustine was an influential figure within western Christianity. It is important to note that Augustine spent his philosophical life learning and adapting his theories on the concept of the soul and therefore he had developed multiple theories concerning its nature shown in *City Of God* (1963) and *Confessions* (1961). It is only in his later works that his definitive concepts on the soul are to be found.

The Venerable Bede (673-735) provides the best picture of the Anglo-Saxon knowledge and use of Augustine. As Kelly explains, for Bede Augustine was an exegete: 'He used the *Confessions* and the *City of God* but only for their exegesis on Genesis; all his citations from the *Confessions* are from books 12 and 13. Bede also cited the three *Genesis* commentaries over two hundred times.' (Kelly, 1999, p.132). Through the use of Augustine, by Bede and others, it appears that 'the Anglo-Saxons had access to a considerable Augustinian library [...] with special attention to the exegetical works' (Kelly, 1999, p.132). We can see the impact of Augustine and the availability of his texts during the entire Anglo-Saxon period. With particular reference to Augustine's commentaries on Genesis, Bede demonstrates the importance he attributed to Augustine's work.

Augustine focuses heavily on Platonic sources, of which he was a keen student. The effect of this focus in Augustine's work ensures that classical ideas are still very much part of Augustine's Christian thought. The ideas found in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* and *Phaedo* are visible both within Augustine's work and, through transference of his religiously directed interpretations of Plato, within *The Phoenix*.

Plato's philosophies cover a wide sphere of theological topics. This thesis, however, will only look at his theories that relate through Augustine's teachings to the poem. One of Plato's most well-known ideas is the theory of forms, in which he views the corporeal world as an imperfect copy or image of the perfect spiritual one. As well as his texts on the immortality of the soul, Plato is concerned with its pre-natal existence and subsequent pre-natal knowledge of the perfect forms. Plato's *Phaedo* focuses on the nature and immortality of the soul in which it is 'from those that are dead [...] that

living things and living people are born' (Plato, 2009 p. 19). Plato is focusing on a universal link through which the existence of all living things is created in their death; in this we see how in the classical era the Phoenix's life cycle could symbolise reincarnation, as in Lactantius's version. The Christian outlook on such a view would be that through death there comes life in God, not reincarnation but resurrection of the body, which will join the soul in God's Kingdom. Augustine's work encapsulates this concept of resurrection, in his discussions of the Christian judgement day, creating a link between *The Phoenix* poet and Plato's work.

It is important to acknowledge that while Augustine did not follow Plato, he was profoundly inspired by him. Though Plato's theories provide a basis for Augustine, he moulds them into a form compatible with Christian doctrine. The relationship of Augustine's Christian interpretation of Plato's works means that Augustine's theories on the soul (be they the original, penultimate or definitive) have much in common with Plato's. It is also worth noting that although Augustine eventually rejected his own theory on the pre-natal soul, this thesis assumes that poet of *The Phoenix* had access to texts such as Augustine's commentary on *Genesis* and his version of *Hexameron* in which the theology of pre-natal existence is evident. *The Phoenix* focuses on creation, redemption, and the death and resurrection of a soul and body. Its author was, as noted, influenced by Ambrose's *Hexameron* and it is plausible, perhaps even likely, that the author would have encountered alternative versions of the *Hexameron*, in addition to Augustine's *Genesis* commentaries.

*The Phoenix*, unsurprisingly, draws heavily upon biblical sources as well as the interpretations of these references made by the accomplished authors previously

stated. Further, matters concerning religious canon law that would have been known by the author, and the effects of such creeds as the Nicean, are noticeable within the text when looking at figures such as Mary and her divine status. Different ideals of Mary were circulating throughout Anglo-Saxon times and the poet's knowledge of them is apparent throughout his work. Such theories and creeds shaped the Cult of the Virgin Mary, which will be discussed historically and in relation to the poem later in the thesis.

## Chapter 2

### The Poem in the Context of Concepts of Religion and Gender Concepts

#### 2.1 The Concept of the Soul

*The Phoenix* can be interpreted as a didactic message on the state and nature of the soul. Before analysing the poem in this context it is important to define how the poet views the concept of the soul. For him, such a concept is of a complex nature in which an individual is viewed with multiple dimensions. These include primarily: the corporeal and divine elements of the soul; the separate identities and consciousnesses such as the contrasting genders and their specific attributes that are distinct within one soul; the needs and requirements of the soul such as the unification of the genders; and, most importantly, the state in which the soul exists as an inner personality or consciousness of a corporeal body, allowing for the concept of Augustine's 'inward turn'. The separation of the soul and the body was a topic of debate in the Anglo-Saxon England, with Christ's and Mary's ascensions, alongside the accounts and calculations of Judgement Day, being of great interest. It was not certain whether one's body would be resurrected after death and if so what state or age the resurrected body would have. Other poems such as *The Fortunes of Men*, in which the many ways in which soul is snatched away from the 'bancofa blodig' (35a, Krapp and Dobbie, 1936, p.139) address these anxieties. Whether the body survives death is not something on which the poem places too much importance. Undoubtedly though, through the imagery of the rebirth of the Phoenix, the poem has some interest in resurrection; however, it remains ambiguous, since the imagery of the new Phoenix and the burial of the bones from the old Phoenix, stand in contradiction to the idea. It

is the soul's requirements for acceptance into Heaven, and the abstract alterations it must make which are the topics of importance.

In looking at the phoenix myth as a reflection on the soul, a historical review of the origin of the myth provides insight into the possibilities of its ongoing allegorical message: 'some of the oldest historical images came from Egypt. Best known, is the motif of a bird with large wings [...] In Greece too the soul was imagined as hovering in mid air, usually as a bird' (Barasch, 2005, p. 13). What is interesting is the phoenix myth's link to the Egyptian and Greek depictions. The Egyptian form of the Phoenix is named *Benu* (Van Den Broek, 1972, p. 10) and in all different accounts there are distinct similarities, such as a fixed life cycle (although not for a fixed period) and the Phoenix's entrance into the world of man after its flight from Paradise. All the myths of the Phoenix in their shared features require a common original form. Van Den Broek (1972, p.10) states that 'various data suggests that the Phoenix derives from the cultural complex of western Asia, which was dominated by Mesopotamia, although this does not necessarily mean that the main development of the myth did not take place in Greece [...] the literary origin of the myth may have been sought chiefly in Egypt.' And as Cook notes, Lactantius's version, the poem's main influence,

'presents an epitome of extant knowledge on the subject. In this respect, and in his reflections on the theme, much surpassing his predecessors; it would not be surprising if his deep interest in it had been either occasioned or strengthened by a sojourn in that country [Egypt].' (1919, p. xxxi)

This deep knowledge and interest of Lactantius could account for some of the poignancy of the depiction of the soul as a bird, and therefore its retention in the alternate versions of the myth. As for the Egyptian version of the Phoenix bird or *Benu*, Rundle Clark (2005, p. 17) ‘regards the *Benu* as the primeval soul and as such the prototype of the individual soul’ (Van Den Broek, 1972, p.17). This depiction of the *Benu* combined with the medieval Egyptian and Greek depictions of the soul as a bird, could have been incorporated into the symbolism of the myth.

Within western Christianity the soul was depicted in a different form: ‘one of the original medieval creations was to envisage the soul that has just left the body in the shape of a new born baby, or a smaller mimic of the individual it was released from’ (Barasch, 2005, p. 17). The infant is visualized as ‘a form of the anonymity of the soul in medieval imagination’ (Barasch, 2005, p. 17). What is interesting here is that in the reading of *The Phoenix* as an allegorical statement of the soul, it is in the rebirth and the infant Phoenix, that the soul is depicted as being freed. In the merging of the classical symbolism adopted for the mythical bird and the westernized Christian visualization of the infant soul. *The Phoenix* depicts the soul’s requirements, such as the unification of its abstract gender attributes, before its departure from its host. In combining all these ideas on both the soul and the phoenix myth in the late antique and Anglo-Saxon periods, the poem depicts the Phoenix as a soul and the new Phoenix as the soul unified and free. Another reason for using the Phoenix as a statement of the soul can be found in the biblical representation of the Holy Ghost, seen as a spirit and depicted in an incorporeal manner in *Genesis* as ‘the spirit of God hovering over the surface of the waters.’(Genesis 1:2, p. 2) This image of the Holy Spirit was recognized within Anglo-Saxon times: evidence for this is shown through

Anglo-Saxon coinage design ‘which is not so much a portrait of Royal power, as an exercise in Christian symbolism.’ Wherein there can be found ‘on the obverse, not a portrait of the king [...] but a figure of the dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit’ (Godden and Keynes, 2007, p. 190). This is important not only because of the identification of the dove as emblematic of the Holy Spirit, but because these coins were produced in a time obsessed with confessing sins in order to ‘earn God’s favor and avert further punishment’ (Godden and Keynes, 2007, p. 190). Through the Holy Spirit the essence of the soul or a wholly spiritual body is depicted; another image of the Holy Ghost in the Bible is suggested by ‘flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them’ (Acts 2:3, p. 654). The two images, the fire and the bird are brought together in the figure of the Phoenix.

In analysing the soul within the poem, it is not simply the manifestation of the soul, but the definition of a spiritual soul, which needs to be determined. The poem shows how the merging of the male and female characteristics or elements of a soul, does not represent the desire to create a new soul at the Phoenix’s rebirth. The two genders simply bring together the elements of a pre-existing soul. The male and the female elements are kept separate at specific times within the poem. As such, an isolated gender of the soul ‘can present itself at any one time only as it is at that time.

However, temporally separate its phases may be, they still require to be identified as parts of the same, continuing thing’ (Quinton , 1962, p.394). Paradise and the Phoenix although parts of the same soul are separate in their forms and are identified separately within the poem. This enables the poet to focus symbolically on the two genders of the soul. The poem’s direct purpose here is to give the reader an insight into the nature of the soul, which can be dominantly masculine or feminine. The poem

then moves on to the genders coming together and becoming one entity. This amalgamation is shown through the poem's depictions of Paradise and Phoenix as inseparable, such as the Phoenix bathing in the fountain. Neither can be involved in the act without the other. Hence, the reader or audience is left with an image which conveys Augustine's notion of how the soul must progress into an androgynous creature in which God's image can once again be more fully mirrored, as Augustine's notion of the second, corporeal forming of man in *Genesis*:

Forþon he drusende    deað ne bisorgað,  
 sare swyltcwale,    þe him symle wat  
 æfter ligþræce    lif edniwe,  
 feorh æfter fylle,    þonne fromlice  
 þurh briddes had    gebreadad weorðeð  
 eft of ascan,    edgeong weseð  
 under swegles hleo  
 (365b- 74a).<sup>2</sup>

Here we go back to the concept of *The Phoenix* as a comment on the pre-creation soul, in which the Phoenix reflects a partial image of the nature of God. As well as addressing the Phoenix's link to the divine, this passage also takes a look at the mortal elements of the Phoenix, amalgamating them together in the poem's major theme: the ability to obtain life through death. The language here is presented with alliteration on selective lines, highlighting key vocabulary and in most cases within individual lines of alliteration, strongly opposing concepts such as 'feorh' (life) with 'fylle' (death), 'swyltcwale' (violent flames) with 'symle' (length of life) creating a paradox in which the two become inseparable. It defies the more natural uneasiness surrounding lexis

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<sup>2</sup> 'Therefore he does not agonize, moping, over death and painful dissolution, for he knows that after the fury of the flame there is renewed existence, life after extinction, when he is regenerated again from ashes in the shape of a bird and grows young afresh beneath heaven's canopy.'

such as fire and death associated with Judgement Day and aligns them with the concept of life and regaining youth. *The Phoenix*-poet uses throughout his work similar concepts, not fully repeated throughout as the meanings behind the multiple uses shift slightly, so in this section it is important to recognise where elements have already been used and to what purpose. The flexibility of vocabulary here is worth noting: Bosworth and Toller translate ‘Þurh briddes háð’ as ‘*through the state of a young bird*’; it is translated by Bradley as ‘in the shape of a bird’ (1995). Through the range of meaning of ‘had’, the new Phoenix is identified as bird-like in both shape and state; that is, its identity as ‘Phoenix’ goes beyond its simple corporeal form. The corporeal element to the bird is described as a ‘state or formation’ paralleling it to the Adam and Eve who first existed and were then formed (Augustine 1982b). The poet here is separating the two aspects; this has already been shown within the poem, in the Phoenix’s early developmental stages, where we see it receive the burden of original sin and death in its forms as the apple and worm. These aspects of the Phoenix’s development, however, will be examined in more detail later in the thesis.

Hence the soul is attached to the figure of a bird, but the vocabulary also suggests that the bird is physically formed; we see how the soul of the mythical creature is shaped into its corporeal body. This concept is fully in keeping with Augustine’s notion that:

the ‘causal reasons’ of man and woman were fully existent in time and fully differentiated as to sex, but they were not yet corporeal. This is the stage of creation to which the text [Genesis: ‘male and female he made them’] about man and woman being equally created in God’s image refers. In the second moment of creation the ‘casual reasons’ of things including Adam and Eve are in due and varying time verified in reality- they become the kind of beings we

see, corporeal, visible and so on: but they had fully existed from the first moment of creation (O'Meara , 1984, p. 55).

Augustine relies heavily on the philosophy of Plato, yet transfers it into Christian doctrine. The pre-existence and universal knowledge of all matter, has been shifted into the pre-creation soul of man. The Phoenix has its continual sequence and eternal life through its soul's existence prior to and after its corporeal body was formed. The reformation of the corporeal body is an image of the continual formation of corporeal being through man in which through the generations the nature of the soul must be rediscovered.

The Phoenix when reborn returns to its home carrying the remains of its former self, suggesting knowledge of its home and of the ritual of burial. In the memory of the Phoenix is the knowledge of the ritual of carrying the remains of its former body to its homeland and burying them. This is another trace of Plato's theory of a pre-natal existence in which:

Our learning is actually nothing but recollection; according to that too, if it's true, what we are not reminded of we must have learned at some former time. But that would be impossible, unless our soul existed somewhere before being born in this human form; so in this way too, it appears that the soul is something immortal (Plato, 2009, p.20).

Plato's concept of pre-natal knowledge was transformed into a Christian concept in which the soul's knowledge of God is expressed, not as Plato would have it as prior knowledge to a previous existence. Such a concept of prior knowledge of God, and a consciousness of returning the soul to a state, in which, it can return to Christ, is also

evident in *The Phoenix* imagery showing the life cycle of the Phoenix. In the bird's life cycle the concept of pre-knowledge is recognised in the Phoenix's knowledge of the ritual of burring the bones. From the leftover bones of the previous Phoenix comes the concept of spiritual knowledge; however, this is paired with the image of death produced in the Christian symbolism of the resurrection, in which the realistic and corporeal ritual of the burial of the old Phoenix's remains takes place. The spiritual and the corporeal, in being merged together, produce a more accessible image. The corporeal burial allows for the spiritual pre-knowledge of the ritual to be accessed linking the two levels of interpretation together.

The bones that the Phoenix carries with him are symbolic of the memory of earthly ritual and the physical body of Christ whereas the Phoenix seeking his homeland is symbolic of the soul's memory of Christ. The newborn Phoenix is not in this sense reflective of a single soul, but generations of souls and their continuing relation to Christ. Augustine in *The City of God* in the thirteenth chapter focuses on the continuation of the original sin. He states:

The first men were indeed so created, that if they had not sinned, they would not have experienced any kind of death; but that, having become sinners, they were so punished with death, that whatsoever sprang from their stock should also be punished by the same death, for nothing else could be born of them than that which they themselves had not been. [...] for man is not produced by man, as he was from dust. For the dust was the material out of which man was made: man is the parent by which man is begotten [...] but as man is the parent, so man is the offspring (Saint Augustine, 1999, pp. 413-4).

The theology in which original sin is renewed in each generation makes it imperative for each soul to find its own redemption. Within *The Phoenix* one will notice the sun appear anew to the new Phoenix. Despite the imagery of renewal, however, the memory of the Phoenix means that it is only a new sun for the newly-born soul; it too will sin so that it will have the ability to meet with the sun as its predecessor did and find redemption. This renewal of the Phoenix links to beauty, which is found in the unchanging nature of the soul. The effect of such repetitive imagery is that it makes the poem's message accessible to all souls; through its rebirth the new Phoenix becomes a new soul and in an eternal sequence it becomes symbolic of all souls. The poem covers a public and a private span in which the individual soul embarks on a solitary inward journey in search of the divine; however, it is something every soul is required to do. We never find the image of a collective group of souls; however, the ancestral imagery in which the Phoenix carries and buries its own remains conveys this inward journey occurring to the individual soul as spanning over generations. The idea of the message and the journey that every individual soul must take, stems from its counterpart in the creation story. It is important to note that in discussing the universal depiction of the soul, the poet is in no way conforming to the Platonic view of a universal soul. All souls are treated as individual and the poem suggests a rule for each separate soul, creating a message that applies to the nature of every soul. In Augustine's discussion of the soul he states:

Death proceeding by ordinary generation from the first man, is the punishment of all who are born of him, yet, if it be endured for righteousness' sake, it becomes the glory of those who are born again; and though death be the award of sin, it sometimes secures that nothing be awarded to sin (Saint Augustine, 1999, p. 416).

If every generation passes down the evil of original sin then every generation also passes down the chance to earn redemption and 'glory' through the soul. In order to possess such redemption the soul must isolate itself from its corporeal sin in order to gain its divine essence and its place in heaven.

In looking at the concept of the construction of the soul, the Phoenix and Paradise can be seen to be a 'connected sequence of mental states and not physical objects' (Quinton, 1962, p. 396). The effect of this in the earthly world, in which corporeal bodies and spiritual ones can renew themselves, must be assessed. The continuum of the Phoenix's life cycle suggests that the bird may return to a separate male gender, with Paradise also becoming an exclusively feminine element once more. This renewal is something, which Augustine's work on the soul can account for, in particular his notion of the inward turn into the spiritual self and the journey needed to get there. Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* 'was a book of immense influence [...] when it was known as the Hexaemeron,' (O'Meara, 1984, p. 52) in which Augustine described two accounts of the creation of Adam and Eve. In addressing the creation of man and woman Augustine states:

Some have conjectured that at this point the interior man was created, but that his body was created afterward, where scripture says *and God formed man of the slime of the earth*. We should then take the expression *God created man* to refer to his spirit; whereas the statement *God formed man* would apply to his body. But they do not realize there could have been no distinction of male and female except in relation to body' (Saint Augustine, 1982, p. 98).

It is easy to see here the ideal of the unification of the genders through the shedding of a corporeal body. In the shedding of the singularly male 'old' Phoenix we find the newborn androgynous Phoenix, reflecting Paradise in its gender unification and finding freedom from the body of its predecessor.

The unification of the genders found within *The Phoenix* does not, at first glance, seem to coincide with the surroundings of the Phoenix at the different stages of its life cycle. Starting in Paradise as a wholly masculine figure, the Phoenix, mixing with the feminine Paradise, moves to the land of men in which the burning of the Phoenix allows it to return to its pre-earthly Paradise in an androgynous state incorporating Paradise, leading the reader full circle. In order for the Phoenix to complete such a cycle and in order to be unified into the androgynous bird, it is required to take part in several ritualistic events and complete two journeys. This requirement of the Phoenix is an important factor of the poem and reflects the inward turn of Augustine, a notion of how the soul recognises itself in the divine.

## **2.2 The Inwards Turn of the Soul**

This chapter is primarily interested in the journey that the Phoenix completes at the end and beginning of its life cycle. We have already established the relationship between the works of the author of *The Phoenix* and St Augustine, and, with such an assumed relationship between the two works, it is Augustine's notion of 'Inner Self' that this chapter will focus upon.

Augustine's view of the soul was that there was an 'inner space' which was

a dimension or a level of being belonging specifically to the soul, distinct from the God above it (and within it) and from the world of bodies outside it (and below it). It is like a space, however, in that it is a dimension of being that can contain things: things are found and seen there as well as lost and hidden there (Carry , 2000, p. 4).

Here is a depiction of Augustine’s idea of the dimension belonging to the inner soul in which all aspects of the soul can be found and lost. This dimension could within *The Phoenix* be identified with Paradise. The Phoenix’s journey to and from Paradise is the soul turning inward to find its female part, in order to be whole.

So far this thesis has focused upon the mythical tale of the Phoenix. However, the commentary accompanying the poem occupies a significant part of the text and in fact alters meanings that within the mythical section of the poem seemed fixed. In relation to the concept of the soul, this section will focus on the episode within the commentary covering lines 583-598. This passage has links to two other passages within the mythical section that mirror each other, showing actions by the old male Phoenix, and the new Phoenix, which includes the female aspect. Lines 583-598 have also been the topic of much debate by critics, owing to their importance in this context:

Swa nu æfter deaðe þurh dryhtnes miht  
somod siþiaþ sawla mid lice,  
fægre gefrætwed, fugle gelicast,  
in eadwelum æþelum stencum,  
þær seo soþfæste sunne lihteð  
wlitig ofer weoredum in wuldres byrig.  
ðonne soðfæstum sawlum scineð  
heah ofer hrofas hælende Crist.

Him folgiað fuglas scyne,  
 beorhte gebredade, blissum hremige,  
 in þam gladan ham, gæstas gecorene,  
 ece to ealdre. þær him yfle ne mæg  
 fah feond gemah facne sceþþan,  
 ac þær lifgað a leohte werede,  
 swa se fugel fenix, in freoþu dryhtnes,  
 wlitige in wuldre  
 (583-598).<sup>3</sup>

From this passage critics have discussed the use of the words ‘fuglas scyne’ (beautiful birds), in particular. The choice of plural forms causes some confusion as to whom the birds and the phoenix represent. Emerson (1926, pp.18-31) finds the Phoenix to be Christ, and ‘equated to the birds which follow the Phoenix’ earlier within the poem are ‘the throngs of blessed souls which follow the lord.’ Emerson here points out the obvious parallels between the two passages, linking the allegory in what Calder called a kaleidoscopic continuum. However, Blake (Mitchell, 1974, pp. 255-6) notes that ‘there is a shift in the allegory in that in lines 583-90 and again in lines 594b-8 Christ is represented by the sun and the Phoenix betokens the blessed who worshiped him.’ Cross suggests that ‘the righteous appear to simulate one feature of the Phoenix, beauty in ‘se beorhta beag’ (602a) (the bright ring) (Cross, 1967, pp. 142-3). It is the concept in which the Phoenix and its thanes are a ‘sawla’ reflected in their creator, that allows for the allegorical shift of the bird’s symbolism within the poem. The

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<sup>3</sup> Now just so after death, through the Lord's might, souls together with body will journey - handsomely adorned, just like the bird, with noble perfumes - into abundant joys where the sun, steadfastly true, glistens radiant above the multitudes in the heavenly city. Then the redeeming Christ, high above its roofs, will shine upon souls steadfast in truth. Him they will follow, these beautiful birds, radiantly regenerate, blissfully jubilant, spirits elect, into that happy home everlasting to eternity. There the fiend, outcast, importunate, cannot treacherously harm them by his evil, but there they shall live for ever clothed in light, gist as the phoenix bird, in the safe-keeping of the Lord, radiant in glory.

thane birds within the poem take the place of the Phoenix within the commentary; keeping their plurality they highlight that the didactic message on the unification of the soul is an individual journey that is required by God from every soul. The choice of 'sawla' to describe the thane birds within this section of the poem is important. 'Sawla' is translated as three separate concepts regarding the soul, which are 'a soul, a human creature', 'the soul, the animal life' or 'the soul, the intellectual and immortal principle in man' (Bosworth and Toller, 2003). All these translations can be used to interpret the symbolic meaning of the poem. By looking at them collectively one attains a picture of the soul in its many forms -- as a bird, as an inner journey and as a human image, linked to the human form. It should also be noted that 'sawla' coming from 'sawel' is feminine. The 'fulgas scyne' (591b) within the commentary are a reflection of the 'sawla' of the new and old Phoenix. They are brought together reflecting the divine nature of God. Through their gendering the poet creates within the imagery a final amalgamation of the genders within the soul. This reading allows for 'fulgas' not to be an error by the scribe but part of a plural sequence within the passage, including, 'sawla'(584) 'sodfaestum sawlum'(589) 'gaestas gecorene'(593) 'him'(594) 'and lifgaD' (596) (Mitchell, 1974, pp. 255-6) . The vocabulary within this plural sequence refers to a spiritual or divine beings, suggesting that the 'fulgas scyne' in being grouped alongside this, are spirits themselves, yet still keeping their corporeal status as the thanes of the more spiritual Phoenix.

The view of the figure of a bird linked to the soul of the *Benue*, the Phoenix figure in Egypt, is a point which should be remembered here, allowing for the Phoenix myth to be adopted into a Christian context without its original significance being completely

lost. This decidedly complex layering of the poem, identified, shows the allegory to be a deliberate ploy by which the nature of the human soul is exposed.

The changing allegorical episodes behind the flight sequences allow for the didactic message to be accessed. The first flight sequence is taken by the old Phoenix on its flight to the human world in order to build its funeral pyre and be reborn. At this stage the Phoenix has interacted with the female element of nature within Paradise but prior to its rebirth it remains within the masculine biblical sphere of the allegory. It is also important to note the lexis within the commentary linking Christ to the sun, which adds more to the allegorical shifts within the poem. With the sun's link to Christ the poet strengthens the concept of the inward turn, as well as identifying the Phoenix as a being symbolically separate from Christ and places it in a lowlier state, allowing for the Phoenix to be identified as the soul.

Prior to the first flight episode the Phoenix meets the sun and is compelled to pour forth harmony and song to the sky. Theologically the Phoenix has knowledge of Christ and has identified its own divine origin. In doing so it holds the key to its own unified nature and becomes a vessel through which such knowledge is transferred via its own inward turn. The fellow birds for their part have not yet found their image in Christ and must complete their own inward turn and therefore cannot have entrance into the Paradise. It is also possible that as the inward turn is something that can only be completed in solitude, the birds within the company could not accompany the Phoenix to its own Paradise. The Phoenix has identified its own inward turn and the other birds must do so on their own account:

þær he ealdordom  
 onfehð foremihtig ofer fugla cynn,  
 geþungen on þeode, ond þrage mid him  
 westen weardað. þonne waþum strong  
 west gewiteð wintrum gebysgad  
 fleogan feþrum snel. Fuglas þringað  
 utan ymbe æþelne; æghwylc wille  
 wesan þegn ond þeow þeodne mærum,  
 oþþæt hy gesecað Syrwaralond  
 corðra mæste Him se clæna þær  
 oðscufeð scearplice, þæt he in scade weardað,  
 on wudubearwe, weste stowe,  
 biholene ond bihydde hæleþa monegum  
 (158b-170).<sup>4</sup>

This flight episode here differs from the commentary in that the Phoenix flies unseen by the human eye; it is surrounded by not only birds but ‘thanes’ in flight, each wanting to serve and follow. The Phoenix is described as being their Lord and takes on the symbolic image of Christ here. The Phoenix in its invasive first journey becomes separated from its thanes, an image fundamentally unnerving and unnatural within Anglo-Saxon times. With the Lord placed in solitude from his thanes we get a disturbance in an otherwise harmonious social setting. In isolation the Phoenix holds an uneasy position until, as the poem progresses, the Phoenix is content in his exile choosing this fate. Through this the poet conjures up images and concepts surrounding isolation similar to those within *The Seafarer* in which it is not isolation from the corporeal thanes which is the loss, but isolation from God. We return here to

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Then resolute in his objectives, burdened with years, he goes flying westwards with fleet wings. Birds throng about the prince - each wants to be vassal and servant to the glorious lord - until they arrive, in greatest multitude, in the land of the Syrians. There the chaste bird quickly hastens away from them in order to occupy a deserted place in obscurity within a grove of trees, concealed and hidden from numbers of mortals.’

the inward turn: monks and nuns within Anglo-Saxon times would sometimes spend their lives in solitary confinement so as to gain favour with God and become close to the divine.

This solidarity removes from the Phoenix some of its mirror elements of Christ as within the Anglo Saxon period, although pictured as having a lord and thane relationship with men, is also pictured as being surrounded by his thanes even in his death. In the *Dream of the Rood*, the cross Christ is nailed to is depicted in terms of a thane as well as Christ being described as ‘reste he ðær mæte weorode’ (Treharne, 2004, p.113: Line 69b) (He rested there with little company). Even in death Christ is said here to be surrounded by a ‘little company.’ This language acts as a euphemism to the unnatural act of being alone. It is, therefore, an important element for the poet in his presentation of the Phoenix’s isolation. The language used within this passage of *The Phoenix* identifies closely with figures represented within *The Seafarer* and the hagiographies, in order to reinforce the message within the poem of the importance of the individual inward turn to Christ.

In his isolation the Phoenix completes his inward turn to God. The thanes, however, in their company are not yet capable of seeing the divine within, or completing the inward turn in which they are able to meet with the sun as the Phoenix has previously done. It is interesting how within the flight sequence when leaving the other birds the Phoenix isolates itself, removing itself from the sight of men. In removing itself on this first journey the Phoenix stresses a point discussed earlier by Augustine that within the inward turn ‘things are found and seen there as well as lost and hidden there’ (Carry, 2000, p.4). The soul within the Phoenix at this point is an entity in

which both the corporeal and spiritual reside, it has no form to speak of and is a personal knowledge to which only the divine and the spiritual have an ability to see it.

Moving on to the second flight episode within the poem the Phoenix here is in its rebirth stage, in which the female element has been incorporated producing an androgynous bird. However, in order to show this mixture and combination of the male and female the second sequence provides a decidedly female biblical allegory in which the Phoenix is representative of the Church:

Swa se fugel fleogeð, folcum oðeaweð  
mongum monna geond middangeard,  
þonne somniað suþan ond norþan,  
eastan ond westan, eoredciestum,  
farað feorran ond nean folca þrypum  
þær hi sceawiaþ scyppendes giefes  
fægre on þam fugle, swa him æt fruman sette  
sigora soðcýning sellicran gecýnd,  
frætwe fægerran ofer fugla cyn.  
ðonne wundriað weras ofer eorþan  
wlite ond wæstma, ond gewritum cyþað,  
mundum mearciað on marmstane,  
hwonne se dæg ond seo tid dryhtum geeawe  
frætwe flyhthwates. ðonne fugla cynn  
on healfa gehwone heapum þringað,  
sigað sidwegum, songe lofiað,  
mærað modigne meaglum reordum,  
ond swa þone halgan hringe beteldað  
flyhte on lyfte; fenix biþ on middum,  
þreatum biþrunge. þeoda wlitað,  
wundrum wafiað, hu seo wilgedryht  
wildne weorþiað, worn æfter oþrum,

cræftum cyþað      ond for cyning mærað  
 leofne leodfruman,      lædað mid wynnum  
 æþelne to earde,      oþþæt se anhoga  
 oðfleogeð, feþrum snel,      þæt him gefylgan ne mæg  
 drymendra gedryht,      þonne duguða wyn  
 of þisse eorþan tyrf      eþel seceð  
 (322-49).<sup>5</sup>

Within this passage we see how on the Phoenix's return journey it becomes visible to man, being sculpted and a source of information to them. Here we have the incorporation of the female and in returning to earlier female passages in which Mary is symbolically represented we can see the continuum of such imagery. In the inclusion of the female abstract alongside Mary, we get not only the merging of the genders but images of the Church and its place within the corporeal world. The alliteration within this passage highlights the effects the Phoenix has had upon the world of man. The knowledge of the Phoenix causes 'mundum mearciað on marmstane' (33) (depict it by hand in marble) as well as 'sceawiaþ scyppendes' (37) (to be beheld) and 'sigað sidwegum, songe lofiað' (passed over distant lands singing praise) and in becoming a beheld image and source of scripture, leads to multi-layered identities for the Phoenix. This passage describes how the writing of men set it free and how they 'shape it into marble.' We return here to the female element drawn out

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<sup>5</sup> 'As the bird flies he reveals himself to the nations, to the multitudes of men throughout the world. Then they gather from south and north, from east and west, in flocks; from far and near they journey in troops of peoples to where they gaze upon the Creator's beauteous gifts in the bird, according as the true King of victories in the beginning ordained for him a rarer nature and fairer embellishments beyond the family of birds. Then people throughout the earth wonder at his form and stature, and their writings proclaim it and they depict it by hand in marble, when the day and the hour reveal to the nations the ornate beauties of the swift-flighted bird. Then the family of birds throng in flocks on every side; from far-flung ways they draw near. With song they praise and with loud voices glorify the brave one, and in a circle surround the holy bird in his flight aloft; in the midst is the phoenix, thronged about with crowds. The nations gaze on and in amazement marvel how the devoted company, one multitude after another, do homage to the wild bird, vigorously proclaim and glorify as king the cherished lord, and escort in raptures the prince to his dwelling-place, until the lone being flies away, swift upon his wings, so that the jubilant company cannot keep up with him.'

from Paradise and now situated within the new Phoenix. The word of God and the Church are feminized in Christian allegory as the 'Bride of Christ' to be viewed by men but belonging to Christ. We move from the individual relationship with Christ to the universal theology of the Christian and the public realm of religion.

This use of a feminized abstract does not blur the role of the Phoenix, the poem only shows that a female aspect is required in the journey from death to life. The imagery of the female Church leading towards Paradise, in which the inevitable masculinisation of the Phoenix will deliver it back to its male suggests that the two genders are in a cycle of their own, for in order to amalgamate and produce a new Phoenix the genders must systematically separate, leading to the final commentary on the nature of the eternal soul.

In discussing the nature of the Phoenix, and it being given adornments above those bestowed on the race of birds, the poet suggests that the religious aspect placed upon the Phoenix in the form of its female element is an adornment which goes above all others. However, only the Phoenix, as the representative of the soul, can choose to move closer to its divine origin in accepting such an adornment. For the men who marvel at the Phoenix, it is the earthly restraints of mankind's corporeal body and surroundings, which keep from them the ultimate freedom of the soul, and obstruct the flight to Paradise.

Through identifying the inner turn of the Phoenix within Paradise, the male finds the female and in this recognition the two become a single entity as an androgynous state representing the pre-creation soul. Augustine's vision of the soul was 'of an inner

palace, with great courtyards open to the sun. To see the light means both entering within and looking upward' (Carry, 2000, p. 5). Here Augustine's view comes from previous writers, Plotinus and Plato, although his vision differs in that he sees the inward turn as being private due to the fact that the soul has fallen away from God. This concept comes from Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, in which the sun is viewed as being the source of freedom, which Plato uses to highlight the social and also self-willed oppression of the human mind. Through a transfer to Christian ideals the society and individualism of Plato becomes representative of the corporeal world and self, oppressing the soul into a sinful life, which the soul needs to break free. This could explain the solitude of the Phoenix when in Paradise, since within Augustine's view of the inner self:

Inwardness involves more than a conception of the self; it is concerned with the divine, the eternal, the ultimate. From its inception inwardness meant seeking a glimpse of the soul's inner relationship to its divine origin (Carry, 2000, p. 5).

Like Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* an outside force, in both these cases represented by the sun, sets an individual free, a force above the individual and acting upon them. Paradise and the Phoenix are representative of the formation of man in a corporeal body prior to the fall; in the poem we see the mixing of the male and female within the inner self or soul. In doing so, the Phoenix gets to see a 'glimpse' of its 'divine origin' in the vision of the sun and reacts to such a vision in its death and birth:

hwonna swegels tapur  
ofer holmþræce    hædre blice,  
leohtes leoma.    Lond beoð gefrætwad,  
woruld gewlitegad,    siþþan wuldres gim

ofer geofones gong grund gescineþ  
geond middangeard, mærost tungla.  
Sona swa seo sunne sealte streamas  
Hea oferhilfað, swa se haswa fugel  
Beohrt of þæs bearwes beame gewiteð  
fareð feþrum snell flyhte on lyfte  
swinsað and singeð swegle tongeanes  
(115b - 124).<sup>6</sup>

The sun appears just after the merging of the genders in the fountain scene, in which the Phoenix appears to be completing a ritualised bathing, prior to its meeting with the sun. After the sun's appearance the Phoenix has knowledge of the divine via the inward turn and we see certain transformations start to take place within the language of the poem. The adjectives used in connection to the Phoenix are by this point within the poem starting to reflect the alterations within the Phoenix to a more unified soul, when an inward image to the divine. 'haswa fugel beohrt' (121-2) (shining grey bird) starts to incorporate the metamorphosis of the Phoenix prior to its 'glimpse of the inner divine.' The Phoenix produces a melody as it follows the sun; this viewing of the sun, and the melodies marking the hours, are recognition of the divine within the Phoenix's Paradise - the sun comes and goes from Paradise and is honoured by the Phoenix. The marking of the hours and the melody of the Phoenix are representative of religious worship in which prayers to God were recited at certain times. Again a statement is being made as to the lifestyle and the inward turn required of the reader in order to reap the rewards of eternal life as the Phoenix does, is here through the language and alignments with the corporeal world of the audience.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Where the taper or firmament, a lamp of light, brightly glints over the tossing of the deep. The land is embellished, the world beautiful, when across the expanse of the ocean the gem of heaven, of stars the most glorious, illumines the earth throughout the word. As soon as the sun high overtops the salt streams then this shining grey bird goes from the tree, out of the grove and swift on his wings he takes flight upon the air and makes melody and sings towards the filament.'

Through the hours and the greeting of the sun the Phoenix as a whole soul is encapsulating both genders, and in imitating pre-creation as well as becoming the image of God it becomes an androgynous and spiritual being. The Phoenix in this sense has reversed the negative inner self in the knowledge of the fall and is heading towards salvation. Augustine believed that one could be ‘dazzled’ by the overpowering light of God but that ‘those endowed with vigorous healthy and really strong eyes have nothing they would rather look at than the sun’ (Carry, 2000, p. 74) We see how the soul once complete can obtain the ‘beohrt’ new appearance, which provides the spiritual eyes with which to see God.

In the continuous sequence of the Phoenix’s life cycle, the question arises as to how and why the Phoenix gains eternal life, and why this only takes place through death. The Phoenix is symbolic of the soul; however, in starting his life cycle again it is implied that the rituals the old Phoenix completed in his lifespan will also be completed by the new Phoenix. If this is true, it is again implied that the Phoenix as a double- gendered soul will become separate again and that the amalgamation rituals will be replayed.

In the commentary accompanying the poem, the concept of a universal soul can again be seen in the poem’s content:

þeah min lic scyle  
on moldærne    molsnad weorþan  
wyrnum to willan,    swa þeah weoruda god  
æfter swylth wile    sawle alyseð  
ond in wuldor aweceð.    Me þæs wen næfre  
forbirsteð in breostum,    ðe ic in brego engla

forðweardne gefean fæste hæbbe.  
(563b-69).<sup>7</sup>

The soul in its death is not only reborn but set free; the continuing life cycle of the allegorical Phoenix is a continual state in which a universal meaning works on two separate levels. It depicts the journey and phases a soul must pass through, but it is ‘a soul’ rather than a specific or particular soul. This universality of the allegory is shown in the tropological level of interpretation in which the Phoenix is Christ, who in his death and rebirth not only returned to heaven himself, but died in order to give man salvation; this is the spiritual journey that every generation after Christ should depart upon. In the harrowing of hell, Christ also offered salvation to the dead showing how such a journey can be made by any soul at any age. What is unchanging is the journey, and the nature of the souls of mankind.

This chapter has focused on the inward turn of the soul, identifying the theories behind and the reasons for such a doctrine. The Phoenix becomes transformed within the poem on its inward turn, becoming a singular cause in which the nature of the soul is explored in its individual relationship, worth and meeting with Christ (depicted as the sun) as well as becoming part of a wider turn to Christ. The identification of the soul is not enough however; an individual must learn how to unify their soul into a pre-creative state before true salvation can be gained and an honest glance at the divine awarded.

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Though my corpse must grow moldered in its earthen chamber as a thing desirable to worms, even so the God of the multitudes will set free my soul upon the hour of death and awaken it in glory.’

It is the unification of the genders within the soul that binds the old and new Phoenix together. The inward turn that Augustine depicted can only be fully successful when the unification has been accomplished, and the androgynous soul can identify itself in the divine. The next chapter will focus on how the genders merge into the new Phoenix and why this is important within the poem.

## Chapter 3

### The Unification of the Genders

#### 3.1 Identification of the Genders

This chapter focuses on the male and female elements at work in *The Phoenix* and the manner in which they amalgamate into one in order to produce an androgynous figure symbolic of the soul. Within the poem, the feminine and masculine are symbolised by Paradise and the old Phoenix respectively. The poem consists of the old Phoenix completing rituals in which it interacts with Paradise, bathing and drinking in its fountain and greeting the sun before both Paradise and the Phoenix merge in its sacramental burning.

The Phoenix, although it can be identified as androgynous, is referred to in the poem with the masculine pronoun 'se' (Ausman, 1996). In *Ave De Phoenice* (1965) a Phoenix completing the same rituals, and to the same end, is described using female inflections. The Old English pronouns have been altered from Lactantius's original feminine inflections and since there are no grammatical reasons for the Phoenix's gender to be altered in the Latin-Old English translation of the poem this is an important change. In the Old English version the gender of the 'fenix' is masculine and therefore the author's choice to alter the gender is deliberate. The androgynous bird's gendered pronouns answer to a tropological need. The masculine pronouns in the old English could be due to the obvious allegorical links to the resurrection of Christ; however, such an insistence on the Phoenix's maleness also allows for it to

stand separate from its surroundings and in its separation allows for the Paradise, in its complementary opposition to the Phoenix, to take on a more feminine aspect.

Ambrose's *Hexameron*, depicting the days of creation and the creatures formed, produces an account of the Phoenix in which it is delivered as an 'example from nature of the certainty of our resurrection' (Ambrose, 1961, p. 219), and is again within the text referred to with masculine pronouns. The introduction of a Christian perspective on the phoenix myth can be viewed as being responsible for this gender change within the lexis. Ambrose in his writing on *The Phoenix* accompanies the tale with a commentary 'by the very act of his resurrection the Phoenix furnishes us a lesson by setting before us the very emblems of our own resurrection without the aid of precedent or reason' (Ambrose, 1961, pp. 219-20). Ambrose does not liken the Phoenix to Christ as *The Phoenix* author does but uses The Phoenix as a symbol to foretell and reflect the events foretold to happen upon man on Judgement Day, instead the text relates to religious men. The pronouns referring to the Phoenix in both Augustine and Ambrose's writings have been altered to the masculine, as the Phoenix in both texts is designed to reflect and relate to its religious, masculine audience. Ambrose suggests 'be aware of the day of your death' (1961, p. 220). In order for the Phoenix symbol to be understood as both a divine figure such as Christ, or the corporeal figure of man, its gender needs to comply with both the image of God and its human audience.

The Old English Phoenix, in this masculine form, is situated within the female sphere, which is the bird's Paradise. The Phoenix at this stage represents the more corporeal element, and is recognised as being in a lowlier state. This element gives the Phoenix

an allegorical link to the figure of Christ. The figure of the Phoenix through this shows the transformation that must take place from a corporeal body to a divine state shown in the reborn Phoenix. In order for the masculine phoenix to achieve the divine state the female element needs is sought out, symbolised in the poem by a bath in the fountain. In order to be whole the female element must in return be united with the male. In the image of the newborn Phoenix we see the incorporation of the female element. With the Phoenix existing in two form's the old masculine and the androgynous newborn, which rises from the ashes of the female landscape and its predecessor. The difference in the language used in the description of the two Phoenix highlights the separation between the old and the new with the change in appearance symbolising the corporeal moving to the divine.

This change in appearance also conveys notions on the soul and flesh, as Ambrose states in his depiction of the mythical Phoenix in the *Hexameron*:

‘like a garment for the body, such is flesh for the soul. You are therefore not a garment, but one who puts on a garment for use and so are told to strip off the old man with his deeds and put on the new’ (Ambrose, 1961, p. 253).

This view of the soul's separation from the body is found within other works of the time. It reinforces the importance, and possibility of, unification between genders. In removing the corporeal element, abstract concepts are not only accessible but they can be used to explain how a soul can enter Heaven and find the divine. In addition, bringing the female abstract to the male within the poem brings to the reader or audience a range of Christian ideas. These concepts include the Church, as, Bride of

Christ, and the Virgin Birth, as well as the Paradise in which the gates of Heaven can be accessed and where the soul can be cleansed of the sin, produced by the corporeal woman Eve.

The links between the genders are illustrated within the passages of the opening description of Paradise, with the portrayal of the new born Phoenix, mirroring the images of femininity, merging them with the masculine Phoenix. The colouring and appearance assigned to both are 'grene' (green), 'glædum gimme' (shining jewel) (193, 303), and 'wrætlice' (75,294). These create further links between the two episodes showing the unification of the genders by transference of the female on to the masculine. This concept of the genders being able to amalgamate reinforces Augustine's concept of the unified soul preceding the fall and following it in death. 'For death is not the destruction of the soul but merely its purification, its separation and its liberation from the body' (Carry, 2000, p. 12). This is again symbolised within the poem in which the new Phoenix although created from its previous self, carries the corporeal body of its predecessor. In the rebirth of the Phoenix we are reminded that:

þonne bið aweaxen    wirtum in gemonge  
fugel feþrum deal;    feorh bið niwe,  
geong, geofona ful,    þonne he of greote his  
lic leoþucræftig,    þæt ær lig fornom,  
somnað, swoles lafe,    searwum gegædrað  
ban gebrosnad,    æfter bælpæce,  
ond þonne gebringeð    ban ond yslan,  
ades lafe,    eft ætsomme,  
ond þonne þæt wælreaf    wirtum biteldeð,  
fægre gefrætwed.    ðonne afysed bið  
agenne eard    eft to secan.

þonne fotum ymbfehð fyres lafe,  
 clam biclyppeð, ond his cyþþu eft,  
 sunbeorht gesetu, seceð on wynnum,  
 eadig eþellond. Eall bið geniwad  
 feorh ond feþerhoma, swa he æt frymþe wæs,  
 þa hine ærest god on þone æþelan wong  
 sigorfæst sette  
 (265-82).<sup>8</sup>

In the designation of the masculine and feminine to the Phoenix and the Paradise respectively, it is worth noting that although ‘Paradise’ belongs to the feminine sphere it is also described in ornamental tones, as parts of Paradise are likened to gems and jewels, which although highly desirable are not ‘alive’.

The female element is here presented in an abstract way not reflective of corporeal feminine qualities, but passive in its complementing of the active and animated, if still grey, masculine Phoenix. It is the masculine Phoenix, which has the power to incorporate the feminine; it flies to the fountain and even marks the hours of the days within Paradise, creating the days by delineating them. Without the male, the female could not be enlivened; however, the male is free of bonds, remaining active and alive without the female.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘When in amongst the herbs he is grown into a bird exultant in his wings his life is renewed - young and full of grace, then out of the dust he gathers up his body strong of limb which fire once disfigured, the residue of cremation, meticulously assembles the bones fragmented as a consequence of the fury of the blaze and then brings bones and cinders, the residue of the funeral pyre, together again, and then rolls up that plunder from the slain, handsomely adorned, in herbs. Then he is impelled to seek again his own homeland. Then in his feet he grips the fire’s residue and clasps it in his claws and seeks again in ecstasies his home, a dwelling radiant with sunlight, his blessed native land. The whole of him, vital being and feather coat, is made new just as he was at the beginning when God, the immutably triumphant, first established him upon that noble plateau. There he brings his own bones which once the billowing of fire engulfed with flame upon the funeral mound, and the ashes too.’

The female ideal here is not a corporeal femininity or even reflective of a female social position of any kind. It is an abstract notion disconnected from the reality of women socially, bodily and intellectually. This is not representative of any woman or group of women, but acts as an ideal feminine; “Male and female” are to be made “one” but they are by no means treated as equals. Rather, if the female is to become a “living spirit” it must become part of the male living spirit in order to have a concrete identity (Meeks, 1974, p. 194). The active and alive male is the host, in which the ornamented female is merged, creating a new Phoenix.

Within the *Gospel According To Thomas* this theme is made explicit: ‘behold that I will take Mary, and make her male, so that she may become a living spirit [...] for I tell you that every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Guillaumont et al., 1959, pp. 113-4). In Mary we find a corporeal female form translated into a masculine spirituality. She almost becomes antithetical to the feminine when placed in opposition to Eve, and acts as a passive receptacle for the dominant male Christ.

The Old English *Phoenix* allows for the unification of the genders rather than the oppression of one by the other. This combining of the genders can be attributed to the more influential perspective of Augustine. Even within an Augustinian viewpoint, there is still the attitude that ‘men form the legitimised body of the community, while women will be allowed to participate only insofar as their own identity is denied and assimilated to that of men.’ (Pagels, 1976, p. 294) At a time when both education and religion lay primarily in the domain of men, the abstract feminine is here

acknowledged, rather than the corporeal qualities of a woman or her actual lived existence and experiences.

In returning to the feminine earthly Paradise in which the Phoenix abides, the reader finds that the description of the landscape uses a mixture of gendered pronouns. This is due to the sheer volume of nouns and adjectives included in the depiction.

However, the earthly Paradise is set in stark contrast to the old Phoenix; the description of the ‘Phoenix’s’ idyllic home is, as noted by Calder, of an ornamental quality, unchanging and filled with passive adornments in which ‘the effect is strongly visual’ (Calder, 1972, p.170). The nature of Paradise is described:

‘Sindon þa bearwas    bledum gehongene  
Wlitigum wæstmym;    þær n(e) w(a)niað o  
Halge under hoefonum    holtes frætwe  
Ne fealleð þær on foldan    fealwe blostman  
Wudbeama wlite’  
(71-5a).<sup>9</sup>

Using words such as ‘frætwe’ (as in the quotation above and elsewhere) and vocabulary including ‘lixed’ (33) (gleamed, shine, glisten)<sup>10</sup> and ‘beorhtast’ (80) (gleaming radiant, bright) as well as the imagery of the sun as a great jewel, creates a passive beauty for the Paradise. The effect of vocabulary is such that not only does Paradise reinforce passive and abstract femininity it interacts in two distinct ways with the masculine Phoenix. Firstly, the feminine Paradise is put in contrast with the male Phoenix, complementing the active male element. In addition, it creates,

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<sup>9</sup> ‘There the wood's adornments, sanctified though below the heavens, never fade, nor do the blossoms, the beauty of the trees.’

<sup>10</sup> Line 33, ‘gleamed, shine, glisten’; line 73, ‘adornments, perfection, ornaments’; line 80, ‘gleaming, radiant, bright’.

alongside the masculine old Phoenix, the new Phoenix, which can be shown to include female traits. Through repetition of such vocabulary and descriptive imageries of jewels and ornaments, we find a reflection of Paradise in the new Phoenix, which is seen as ‘a piece of art hardly born of the natural world at all’(Calder, 1972, p. 174).

The old Phoenix is described in a more earthly and corporeal way with little physical detail; although magnificent and beautiful, the bird is also a beautiful ‘grey.’ It hardly bears comparison to the brightly coloured, glistening gem, which is the new Phoenix.

In the limited description of the old Phoenix the vocabulary used is also worth noting:

Se hit on frympe gescop  
ðone wudu wearðap    wundrum fæger  
fugel feþrum strong    se is fenix haten  
þær se anhaga    eard bihealdeþ  
deormod drohtað    næfre him deap scepeð  
on þam willwonge    þenden woruld stondeþ  
se sceal þære sunnan    sið behealdan  
ond ongean cumin    godes condelle.  
Glædum gimme    georne bewitigan,  
Hwonne up cyme    æpelast tungla  
Ofer yðmere    estan lixan,  
Fæder fyrngeweorc    frætwum blican  
Torht tacen godes    tungol beoþ ahyded  
Gewiten under waþeman    westdælas on,  
Bideglad on dægred    ond seo deorce niht  
Won gewiteð;    þonne waþum strong

Fugel feþrum wlonc on firgenstram  
Under lyft ofer lagu loca georne,  
Hwonne up cyme eastan glidan  
Ofer sidne sæ swegles leoma  
(84b-103).<sup>11</sup>

The alliteration here emphasises the positive description of the bird, reinforcing his male attributes, and contrasting them with the ornamental tones used to describe the sun ('glæd gim', a bright jewel) The phrase 'glædum gimme' is repeated within the poem later at 303a in the description of the new Phoenix, who has been able to identify himself in the divine and unify the male and female aspects of the soul. The phrase 'wundrum fæger' (85b) (wonderfully fair) is also repeated in line 307b linking the two episodes together, with the new unified spiritual Phoenix being a reflection of the old.

The lexis used for the old Phoenix includes 'strong' (86) and 'deormoð' (87). Bosworth and Toller translate this to be 'bold of mind, brave' (Bosworth and Toller, 2003). This language conjures up connotations of the male attributes found within the more masculine confines of society. *The Dictionary of Old English Online* translates 'deormoð' as 'brave, bold or bold-spirited' (Bosworth and Toller, 2003) which are again all masculine associated traits, such as the ideals of the traditional comitatus. 'Deormoð', for example, is found within a range of Old English texts, most notably in *Daniel*: 'on felapam þe deormode diran' (Blackburn, 1907, pp. 78, 171).<sup>12</sup> Other

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<sup>11</sup> 'That wood a bird inhabits, wonderfully fair, strong of wings, which is called Phoenix. There this creature unparalleled keeps his dwelling and, courageous of heart, his way of life; never shall death harm him in that pleasant plateau while the world remains. He is accustomed to observe the sun's course and to address himself towards God's candle, the brilliant gem, and eagerly to watch for when the noblest of stars comes up over the billowy sea, gleaming from the east, the ancient work of the Father ornately glinting, God's radiant token.'

<sup>12</sup> 'In the plain which the brave men call.'

listings found in the Bosworth and Toller place the use of ‘deormoð’ within more masculine contexts.<sup>13</sup> This descriptive language gives the Phoenix not only masculine attributes but a masculine corporeality in which, through mixing with feminine elements, the Phoenix will shed its corporeal ‘grey beauty’ and in doing so return to its original pre-creation state - the soul. Then, the two genders can be fused in the corporeal state, allowing for the androgynous rebirth of the Phoenix. The symbolism of the merging of the two genders is a direct reference to the unification of the soul. In this unification the Phoenix has completed the inward turn and found the divine. It has therefore found its salvation of the soul from the impending Judgment Day, which is one of the poem’s secondary themes. The poem concentrates on the survival of the soul, which in order to gain entrance into heaven must return to its original state, of unification of the genders.

Within the poem, the genders are unified in the androgynous newborn Phoenix through a variety of rituals. The rituals carried out by the Phoenix, such as bathing in the fountain and the making of its nest, symbolically represent religious rituals such as baptism, and also allegorically merge the masculine and feminine into one entity. In the twelve-fold bathing in the fountain, we see the feminine aspect emerge. Although Heffernan may be too extreme in her feminisation of the poem from an anthropological perspective, her views upon the flowing fountain as representative of female menstruation are of interest (Heffernan, 1988). From a Christian viewpoint, the overflowing fountain and Paradise within which the fountain is a central part can

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<sup>13</sup> [http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/html/oe\\_bosworthtoller/b0202.html](http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/html/oe_bosworthtoller/b0202.html) , **deór-móð**; *adj.* [deór I. *brave, bold*; móð *mood, mind*] *Bold of mind, brave*; fortis an&i-short;mi :- Wearþ adræ-acute;fed deórmóð hæleþ *the brave hero was driven away*, Chr. 975; Erl. 126, 18; Edg. 44: Exon. 46 b; Th. 159, 11; Gú. 925: 79 b; Th. 298, 22; Crä. 89: Andr. Kmb. 1251; An. 626: Fins. Th. 46; Fin. 23. On felda ðam ðe deórmóde Diran héton *in the plain which the brave men called Dura*, Cd. 180; Th. 226, 14; Dan. 171. Deórmóðra siþ *the march of the brave*, 147; Th. 183, 25; Exod. 97.

be seen to represent feminine fertility, with which the masculine element is merged through birth.

The next part of this chapter will focus on why the genders need to amalgamate, connecting specific biblical figures to the genders and examining the poem's didactic message.

### **3.2 Mariology, Paradise and the Sexualised Female Element**

For the femininity within the poem, Mary is the central influence. Also known as the 'fountain of living water,' Mary's role is to bring life. However, here again we are not gaining an insight into a female figure so much as a female abstract, through which one can enter into Heaven. Mary by this time had already been depicted with strong links to fountains. In the fifth century a rare iconic composition called 'life – bearing font' or 'mystical fountain' originating from Constantinople shows:

Mary holding the Christ child and standing in a fountain. [...] the font is shaped like a chalice. Its image is both baptismal and Eucharistic. Just as Mary encouraged the turning of the water into wine at Cana, so, through bearing Christ into the world she also made possible the turning of wine into the blood of Christ (Duckworth, 2004, pp. 137-8).

Mary here is viewed as a *Theokos* where it is not Mary herself that is significant, but her ability to create Christ in the corporeal form of man. Mary's image here focuses on the transition of matter, or water into wine, divine into a corporeal body and the possibility of the corporeal world into a divine Paradise. The female element of the

poem, such as the Paradise reflects this iconic image of Mary and it is through the merging with Paradise that the male Phoenix can receive life.

During the Anglo-Saxon period, there was ‘an increasing interest and devotion to the Virgin Mary. Significant traces of female symbolism of God, the soul and the Church remained, ultimately being channelled into Mariology’ (Ruther, 2005, p. 127). *The Phoenix* uses Mariology via the image of the fountain representing the female element of the soul prior to the Fall and Eve’s sin. One of the key rituals within the poem is the Phoenix’s bathing within the fountain or stream located in Paradise. In doing so the Phoenix takes part in a ritual in which the female Paradise and the old male bird become temporarily amalgamated. This ritual not only prepares for the more permanent amalgamation of the genders which comes at the birth of the new Phoenix, it allows for the genders to express sexuality linking them to Mariology and through that the Church. The Virgin Mary is swathed in sexuality, whether it be eliminated in her image as the Holy Virgin figure of motherhood and nurture or, intensified through her link to the Church and the image of the bride of Christ in the allegory of the union between Christ and faith. In the fountain passage within the poem, the mixing of the water and the Phoenix is poignantly expressed:

Swa se æpela fugel     æt þam æspringe  
Wiltigfæst wunað     wyllestreamas  
þær se tireadge     twelf siþum hine  
bibapað in þam burnan     ær þæs beacnes cyme,  
sweglcondelle,     ond symle swa oft  
of þam wilsuman     wyllegespryngum  
brimcald beorgeð     æt baða gehwylcum.  
siþþan hine sylfne     æfter sundplegan

heahmod hefeð on heanne beam,  
þonan yþast mæg on eastwegum  
si bihealdan, hwonne swegles tapur  
ofer holmþræce hædre blice,  
leohotes loem  
(104-16).<sup>14</sup>

This passage brings to mind a section of the *Song of Songs*, supposedly written by Solomon, which was interpreted as a celebration of love between Christ and the Church:

You are my private garden, my treasure, my bride  
A secluded spring, a hidden fountain  
Your thighs shelter a paradise of pomegranates  
With rare spices [...]  
You are a garden fountain  
A well of fresh water  
Streaming down from Lebanon's mountains  
(Song of Songs, 12-15, p. 401).

The passage is full of sexual connotations in which the 'Church' is feminised and becomes an object of sexual desire, viewed by the male Christ figure as a Paradise and specifically a fountain or stream. What is particularly intriguing in *The Phoenix* is that, as David Clark notes, 'the Old English poet employs mixed terms so that it is unclear whether a fountain or merely a stream is being described, and he certainly desacralizes and naturalizes the waters' (2009, p. 158). Terms such as 'firgenstream' (100), 'wylgesprungum (109)' and 'wyllestreamas' (105) are the focus of his study,

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<sup>14</sup> 'As the noble bird, unchangingly handsome, frequents the welling streams at the fountain-head, there the glory-blessed creature laves himself in the brook twelve times before the advent of the beacon, the candle of the firmament, and ever as often at each laving sips water cold as the sea from the pleasant well-springs. Then after splashing in the water, exalted in mood he betakes himself up into a tall tree from where he may most easily observe the journey on the eastern paths, when the taper of the firmament, a lamp of light, brightly glints over the tossing of the deep.'

opening up further interpretations upon the poem. The poem is similar to the *Song of Songs* in not having a precise definition of the state of the water. The continual alterations in the descriptions within the biblical account of Solomon are reflected within the poem's lexis, strengthening the possibility of the *Song of Songs* being another source for the poem.

Mary, as symbolic of the 'feminine imagery of the Church as wisdom, bride and mother, was absorbed into Mariology by the later Church Fathers and spread widely during the Middle Ages. Already in the fourth century Ambrose and Augustine had identified Mary as the "type' of the Church' (Ruther, 2005, p. 146). Therefore it is highly likely that, given our poet's association with Augustine and Ambrose, this imagery would be well known and therefore present in his writings.

The Old English poem correlates closely to the biblical passage in the feminine Paradise being secluded only for the male Phoenix, as well as Paradise being filled with fruits. Both the biblical text and *The Phoenix* evoke the senses, the biblical with the mention of spices and pomegranates, arouses sensations of fragrance surrounding the fountain. *Song of Songs* also creates a bodily image with this passage's references to 'thighs' and creating a highly sexualised description. The Old English *Phoenix* uses slightly sexualised language, which also evoke the senses. The Phoenix reportedly 'beorgeð' (110) the cold oceanic water, which as a feminine element and symbolic of both the Church and Mary, creates a sexualised union between the two genders. Through the use of this language the poem suggests the act of a sexual amalgamation of the two genders prior to the birth of the new Phoenix, defining the act as 'other' as critics have labelled it, effectively a conception sequence. The amalgamation of the

genders and what they symbolically represent, combine here in an act that allows the Phoenix to finally transcend into spiritual birth. In this way the poem focuses on corporeal desire, that transforms it into a spiritual conception of the self.

The use of taste, when invoked within a concept of conception and birth gives connotations of nurturing and breast-feeding. Seemingly the idea of breast-feeding within Solomon's *Song of Songs* morphs into a male-dominated area in which 'the father has full breasts milked by the spirit that gives life to believers and causes Mary to conceive' (Ruther, 2005, p.133). What is here seen as an act of gender displacement within the poem does not in fact alter the gender specifications of the Paradise and the Phoenix. The effect of the swap in gender roles within the ritual, where both genders are in contact, simply shows how the amalgamation of the genders allows the soul to reach a spiritual level. God takes on the role of the nurturer as the gender roles are in a constant state of flux.

Within the fountain passage, the Phoenix is also noted to be 'sundplegan' (111) in the fountain, creating an image of the Phoenix at ease in its submersion in the female. In providing such sexual imagery the poet strengthens the bond between the genders and allows for, the immersion of one into the other representing a more spiritual and abstract amalgamation into one entity. The corporeal element to the sexual mixing of the genders has been recognised by Heffernan (1988) as a conception sequence within the poem. Although she has noted the conception imagery, Heffernan does not acknowledge the religious importance of such a concept. The Phoenix, in taking part in such a sexually charged scene, is in fact rendered asexual in its corporeal body. Its sexual union is with the divine, as the bride of Christ. The poet in using imagery of a

sexualised nature alongside the symbolism of Mary, dismisses corporeal sexual desire and pleasure. The genders are at this point unified within the soul and therefore have only the desire for union with God.

With the bathing of the Phoenix the reader is confronted by imagery of the conception of Christ, the amalgamation of the genders, the marriage of the Church and God, and the distinction between the divine and corporeal. These are all stages through which all Christians must pass in a spiritual sense for their souls to progress into heaven. It is not only through the image of the fountain that we find the symbolic form of Mary and through her the female element, but also with Paradise as a whole that we find such a concept:

Hæbbe ic gefrunge þate is feor heonan  
Eastdælum on æþelast londa  
Firim gefræge. Nis se foldan sceat  
Ofer middangeard mongum gefere  
Folcagendra, ac he afyrred is  
þurh mætudes meht manfremmendum  
(1-6).<sup>15</sup>

Within the poem's opening passage we see the idyllic home of the Phoenix described with a certain similarity to the biblical account found in Ezekiel 44:1-4 (2004, p. 518):

Then the man brought me back to the east gateway  
In the outer wall of the temple area, but it was closed  
And the lord said to me "this gate must remain closed;  
It will never again be opened. No one will ever open  
It and pass through it, for the LORD of the God of Israel  
Has entered here. Therefore it must always remain shut.

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<sup>15</sup> I have heard that far away from here in the regions of the east exists the noblest of lands renowned among men. This expanse of earth is not accessible to many of the potentates across the world.

Only the prince himself may sit inside this gateway  
To feast in the lord's presence. But he may come and go only  
through the entry room of the gateway.

The use of 'mongum gefere' (4) (removed from men) is key here, highlighting the sacred nature of the Paradise and signposting the passage as being a symbolic reference. The concept of a sanctuary or Paradise, with the detailing of the eastern location, suggests a visible link between the two passages. If we view the passage in this way we are left with the concept that it is through the active male, represented by Christ and the passive, impregnated feminine element represented by Mary, that a person's soul can reach the 'eastern gates' and gain entry into Heaven.

In looking at the second part of Ezekiel's passage through the Marian interpretation, it is clear that before the mixing of the two genders 'it was shut' but after the male and female merge to create 'Christ' we see that the gates can be passed through. All who reflect the nature of Christ in the mixing of the genders, therefore, will be able to 'enter by way of the vestibule of the gate'; in other words, the poet reinforces the didactic teaching of the unification of the genders within the soul. Mary's role here is that 'she brings together things in Heaven and on earth and thus she is a proleptic realization of the final, eschatological consumption' (Benko, 1993, p. 121). Benko here is referring to the Virgin Mary as the symbolic body of the Church. This proleptic realization is transferable; the female element, whether through the church or within the soul, opens up the possibility of heaven. It becomes didactic through the poem as Mary not only acts as a role model for women, but also fulfils a universal need for fertility and nourishment.

Again in other texts from Anglo-Saxon period we see a recurring theme with regard to Mary as the entrance to Heaven:

Iu geara heofonrices duru, þu ic wæs þurh hider onsended belocen  
standeð þurh þa æresten men, nu heo sceal þonne þurh þe onteneð  
beon. Eala þu eadige Maria, eall þeos gehæft- world bideþ þinre  
geþafunga: forþon þe God þe hafað to gisle her on middangearde  
geseted & Adames gylt þurh þe sceal beon gepigod & þæm þe geara  
ablogen wæs for manna synnum þæt he þone halgan ham beleac. þurh  
þe sceal beon se ingang eft geopenod  
(Morris, 2000, p. 8).<sup>16</sup>

In this Blickling homily, Mary is seen as the entrance to a 'holy home' in which divine and human, male and female, reside unified. Also important is its mirror image of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. *The Phoenix* poem emphasizes this too through the same imagery of the gates; in a poem full of unification it seems necessary to link the two accounts. There is not only a passage linking Mary to the eastern gate, but one also for Adam and Eve:

After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim  
to the east of the Garden of Eden.  
And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth,  
to guard the way to the tree of life.  
(Genesis 3:2, 2004).

Through the figure of Mary, the divided genders can find a way back to unification.

Through the biblical account, first the soul will find Paradise, then it will shed its sins

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<sup>16</sup> 'Now, for a long time, the door of heaven's kingdom, through which I have been sent hither stands closed through [the sin of] the first persons, but now through thee they shall be unclosed. O thou blessed Mary all this captive world awaiteth thy consent; for God hath appointed thee as a surety here in the world, and thought thee shall intercession be made for Adam's guilt to him who formerly, on account of man's sin, was so angry that he closed the holy home; but through thee shall the entrance again be opened.'

and body, finally becoming unified in an androgynous image of its creator, God.

‘Beginning and end are similar because of the submission of all to God, but that does not exclude the possibility of progress between the beginning and the end’ (Crouzel, 1871 p.205). Such is the life cycle of the Phoenix, used to reinforce a notion of unification of genders and divine and mortal existence within the soul. The mythical bird encapsulates it all. Able to return to its beginning at the same time as its end, the androgynous Phoenix is the abstract soul in God’s image.

In acknowledging Mary as Paradise the previously discussed ‘inward turn’ to the soul also comes full circle. Mary as Eve’s counterpart carries Christ, Adam’s counterpart through whom salvation can occur. The inward turn has both beginning and end with the merging of the old and the new, the male and the female, the corporeal and the spiritual within the soul, watched over by God’s light (or, in the poem’s symbolic imagery the sun). The poem thus creates a fullness in which the soul is welcomed into Heaven.

In a fifth-century sermon we even see Mary linked to the Phoenix, the author states: ‘The Phoenix burned itself on the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem on the eighth day after the holy virgin had brought forth our saviour’ (Broek, 1972, p. 122). Mary in holding no sin returns to a state of purity preceding the fall, a state, which the poem suggests the soul should aim to emulate. The fountain is a tropological interpretation, in which the fountain and Paradise becomes the womb, which itself encapsulates the Phoenix as Christ. In such an interpretation Mary’s womb and the female form can be seen to aid with the entrance into Heaven. As well as the obvious Marian associations with the feminine, there is the notion of the Church as the Bride of Christ. Both of

these concepts, the Bride and Mary come together in Revelations 12. 1:2 (2004): ‘et signum magnum paruit in caelo mulier amicta sole et luna sub pedibus eius et in capite eius corona stellarum duodecim et in utero habens et clamat parturiens et cruciatur ut pariat’.<sup>17</sup> Such female figures within Christianity are linked to the soul’s entrance into heaven, Mary symbolises firstly, the rejection of sin and secondly, the Church or Bride bridging the gap between the corporeal and the divine. The woman in the book of *Revelations* shares similar characteristics to the fountain within the Phoenix:

‘þa monþa gehwam of þære moldan tyrf  
brimcald brecað, bearo ealne geondfarað,  
þragum þrymlice. Is þæt þeodnes gebod,  
þætte twelf siþum þæt tinfæste  
lond geondlace lagufloða wynn  
(Bradley, 1995, p. 268).<sup>18</sup>

Having gone through the previously mentioned rituals the Phoenix creates for itself a nest or pyre on which it periodically burns. This is the final act of the amalgamation of the genders. Through this act of rebirth and reunification of the two genders, the Phoenix becomes reborn as a new symbolic figure.

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<sup>17</sup> ‘And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And being with child, she cried travailing in birth: and was in pain to be delivered.’

<sup>18</sup> ‘There the glorious creature bathes twelve times in the brook before the coming of the beacon, heaven’s candle; and even as many times, at every bath, cold as the sea, it tastes the pleasant waters of the spring.’

The merging rituals of the Phoenix and Paradise are symbolic of the mixing of the two separate genders belonging to the soul. The poem's symbolism focuses on the integration of the two into one spiritual entity, the new Phoenix.

### **3.3 The Re-Birth of the Phoenix with Paradise**

In the rebirth of the mythical bird, the old and the young, reborn Phoenix have one thing in common: they are both noted as being 'un-changeable.' This emphasises that at a fundamental level they are the same entity or of the same existence regardless of their physical changes, or even of the remains separated from the Phoenix in its death and subsequent rebirth. The description of the old Phoenix as 'lagu locað' in the first of its two seemingly very varying descriptions, designates it as a 'changeless bird'. This is not reinforced by the strikingly different passage, displaying the new Phoenix in a multitude of colours as opposed to the old 'grey' Phoenix. One reason for such inconsistent description can be found in a later passage in which the Phoenix makes and then burns in his nest; he is said to be 'þurh gewittes wylm' (191). In different translations 'þurh gewittes wylm' is thought to mean 'through an upsurge of awareness' (Bradley, 1995, p. 290), 'through the urging of its mind', or as Cook notes, through excitement of mind or 'through perturbation of spirit' (1919, p. 113). We see the change comes about in the 'spirit' of the bird and through this awareness the soul of the old Phoenix becomes visible in the form of the new Phoenix. It is the awareness of the spirit or the soul that is the unchangeable beauty of the Phoenix. Augustine suggests this when he writes:

I entered and saw with the eye of my soul such as it was, above that same eye of my soul, above my mind, the unchangeable light- not the common light

obvious to all flesh nor as were something greater of the same kind, shining more brightly... but other, quite than all these things; nor was it above my mind as oil is above water or heaven above the earth, but it was above because it made me and I was below because made by it. Whoever knows the truth knows it and whoever knows it knows eternity (Carry, 2000, p. 39).

The unchanging nature of the Phoenix's soul is its link to the divine, and is shown to underline the beauty of the Phoenix. In the Phoenix's rebirth the same unchanging qualities of the 'grey bird' are set free through the female element, animating it and exposing the secret behind its true beauty and divinity, the soul.

The Phoenix, in its rebirth, although still referred to as male through the Old English poet's chosen pronouns, has incorporated its opposite and become a fully androgynous entity. Within the 'reborn Phoenix' there are striking resemblances between the description and vocabulary of the opening description of Paradise:

Is se fugel gægel forweard hiwe  
Bleobrygdum fag ymb þa breost foran.  
Is him þæ heafod hindan grene,  
Wrætlice wrixled wurman geblonden  
þonne is se finta fægre gedæled,  
sum brun, sum basu, sum blacum splottum  
searlice beseted. Sindon þa fiþru  
hwit hindanweard ond se hals grene  
niopoweard on ufeweard ond þæt nebb lixeð  
swa glæs opþe gim geaflas scyne  
innan ond utan. Is seo eagebyrd  
stearc ond hiwe stane gelicast,

gladum gimme þonne in goldfate  
simþa orþoncum biseted weoþeð  
(291-304).<sup>19</sup>

In the section of the poem labelled by Cook as ‘The Appearance of the Phoenix’ (1919, p. 60) taking up lines 291-319, the poet begins by describing the newborn Phoenix as ‘Is se fugel fæger forweard hiwe’ (Cook, 1919, p.60, line 294b): ‘Fæger,’ is found in line 8 as well as line 64 (shown above) at the beginning of the poem in the description of paradise. ‘Fæger’ translated as fair or beautiful (Bosworth and Toller, 2003), is a commonly-used adjective within Old English texts. However, it is most often associated with the earth or land, as in its first use within *The Phoenix*. It has, however, been used to describe divine beings or in relation to women. In the representation of women, it is used in a variety of texts such as in the poem *Elene* where a very similar image is depicted: ‘Ne hýrde ic síþ ne ær on égstreáme idese lædan mægen fægerre’ (I never heard before or since that a female led on the ocean-stream a fairer power) (Bosworth and Toller, 2003). The image conjured up in *Elene* is of female power, which is seen as fair, beautiful, highlighting the respect shown for female attributes within Anglo-Saxon society. In using vocabulary associated with nature, divinity and the feminine state the poet creates not only a connection to the ‘fæger’ in lines 8 and 64, but he reinforces the link between such nature and femininity.

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<sup>19</sup> The bird is handsome of coloring at the front, tinted with shimmering hues in his forepart about the breast. His head is green behind, exquisitely variegated and shot with purple. Then the tail is handsomely pied, part burnished, part purple, part intricately set about with glittering spots. The wings are white to the rearward, and the throat, downward and upward, green, and the bill, the beautiful beak, inside and out, gleams like glass or a gem. The mien of his eye is unflinching, in aspect most like a stone, a brilliant gem, when by the ingenuity of the craftsmen it is set in a foil of gold. About the neck, like a circlet of sunlight, there is a most resplendent ring woven from feathers. The belly below is exquisite, wondrously handsome, bright and beautiful. The shield above, across the bird's back, is ornately yoked. The shanks and the tawny feet are grown over with scales.



gumum to gliwe in þas geomran woruld  
(131b-39).<sup>21</sup>

Again it is easy to pick out the repetition of ‘ne,’ which is present in both the original Phoenix’s singing and the Paradise, and the alliteration used alongside the repetition linking these sections of text in their emphasis on what is not. The repetition of ‘ne’ is transformed into ‘sum’ after the amalgamation of the female Paradise and male Phoenix. The poet reveals through the language this aspect of a new-found self - showing the Phoenix’s potential to be inclusive of both genders and in doing so finds life after the fire in a unified soul.

In returning to the new Phoenix as a new soul of a new individual, representing the universal handing down of original sin from one generation to the next it is important to look at the birth of the new Phoenix and the symbolism involved:

Hwæpre him eft cymeð  
æfter fyrstmearce feorh edniwe,  
siþþan þa yslan eft onginnað  
æfter ligbræce lucan togædre,  
geclungne to cleowenne. þonne clæne bið  
beorhtast nesta, bæle forgrunden  
heaporofes hof; hra bið acolad,  
banfæt gebrocen, ond se bryne sweþrað.  
þonne of þam ade æples gelicnes  
on þære ascan bið eft gemeted,  
of þam weaxeð wrym, wundrum fæger,

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<sup>21</sup> ‘The harmony of the song is sweeter and more beautiful than all musical instruments and more delightful than every melody. Not trumpets, nor horns, nor the sound of the harp, nor the voice of any man on earth, nor the strain of the organ's melody, nor the wings of the swan, nor any of the joys which the Lord created for men's mirth in this mournful world.’

swylce he of ægerum    ut alæde,  
 scir of scylle.    þonne on sceade weaxeð,  
 þæt he ærest bið    swylce earnes brid,  
 fæger fugel timber;    ðonne furþor gin  
 wridað on wynnum,    þæt he bið wæstmum gelic  
 ealdum earne,    and æfter þon  
 feþrum gefræt wad,    swylc he æt frymðe wæs,  
 beorht geblowen  
 (222b-40a).<sup>22</sup>

Again within this section of the poem we see alliteration used to focus the passage.

The colliding concepts of growth and youth are set once more against the tropes of death, and images of damage such as ‘banfæt gebrocen’ (229) (‘the broken bone-vessel’). This phrase is particularly intriguing and works well with ‘wridað on wynnum’ (237) (‘he grows in joys’). The phrase ‘wridað on wynnum’ is used to describe the new Phoenix’s metamorphosis from a worm to the young eagle.

However, ‘wridað’ is used figuratively here, of growth in things abstract (Bosworth and Toller, 2003), so the poem allows for the ‘growth’ of the new Phoenix to be in both a concrete corporeal sense and an abstract spiritual sense. In the ‘banfæt gebrocen’ the poem is more ambiguous in its message, suggesting that the new Phoenix is more of a spiritual being emerging from a broken corporeal vessel.

The imagery of the new Phoenix being born from an apple and a maggot or worm is reflective of the origin and consequences original sin had upon man. The apple

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Yet after a space of time, life returns to him anew, when the cinders, congealed into a ball, begin to join together again after the fury of the flame. When that most resplendent of nests, the brave bird’s dwelling, is clean reduced by the blaze; and the corpse the fragmented bone-frame, is grown cool and the conflagration subsides, then out of the pyre, among the ashes, the likeness of an apple is afterwards discovered, from which a worm develops, wonderfully handsome, as though it had hatched out of eggs, gleaming out of the shell. Then in a shady place he develops, so that he becomes like an eagle’s chick, a handsome fledgling. Still further then he blissfully burgeons until he is alike in features to an adult eagle, and after this he is adorned with feathers just as he was in the beginning, brought radiantly to fulfillment. At that time the flesh is born again, wholly renewed and dis severed from sins.’

reflecting the cause of original sin has a worm growing out of it, which becomes the new Phoenix. 'One particular worm, the Indian or silk worm, occurs as a symbol of the resurrection of the soul in two hexaemeral works belonging to Basil and Ambrose well known to Anglo-Saxon writers' (Spencer, 1964, p. 4). Given the direct link of the worm to the Phoenix in both these well-known contemporary texts, it is unsurprising that the link was recreated in the Phoenix. However, Spencer in her article 'The Anglo-Saxon Phoenix and Tradition' identifies the danger in assuming the worm to be anything more than a 'worm of leaves'. Its association with the silk worm should not suppose any other reasoning for the feature of a worm explored. The image of the worm could have been identified in the Anglo-Saxon times as a creature that derives from death and decay in its similarity to a 'maggot'. Maggots appear from the decaying bodies of the deceased, supposedly being born of death. This link to death in the symbol of the worm represents the symbolic birth of the next generation, born into sin, death and decay. Following such imagery the renewal of all is the life cycle, in which the new soul finds its own redemption and brings forth new life, passing on yet again original sin and starting the cycle once more.

Finally the worm transforms into a figure similar to 'swylce earnes brid' (235b) (the eagle's young). The figure of the eagle also has strong biblical links as a symbol of Resurrection: 'He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies, He fills my life with good things, my youth is renewed like the eagles!' (Psalm 103, p. 359) This view of the eagle is fitting with the poem's overwhelming theme of the Phoenix's rebirth. In Job 39: 27-30, however, we get a distinctively different image of the eagle's nature, linked with death:

Is it your command that the eagle rises  
to the heights to make its nest?

It lives on the cliffs,  
making its home on a distant rocky crag.  
from there it hunts its prey,  
keeping watch with piercing eyes.  
Its young gulp down blood,  
where there is a carcass there you'll find it.

This image of the eagle as a creature of death, around a dead body highlights the possibility of the worm representing a similar symbol of the requirements of death for the birth of each generation. The death of the Phoenix is both the death and salvation of itself unifying the genders and returning to a pre-creative state. The Phoenix's death and rebirth is however also symbolic of the new generation and in the parent's death it is to the next generation that salvation and unification of the genders of soul must take place in order to reverse the decay and death of original sin they were born out of and in to. Hence the Phoenix as a double entity being in itself both father and son. This concept as the Phoenix is representative of two souls, or a birth of a soul through the mixing of the genders.

A final point with regard to the exploration of *The Phoenix*, and one that would require much more space to explore fully, is to examine how the Anglo-Saxons viewed the traits which produced the likeness of both parents in a child. The earliest known ideas on genetics are from centuries after the Anglo-Saxons, and it is impossible to tell how they would have explained hereditary. However in taking these views, we can see how the male Phoenix has to interact with the female in order to produce a new self, and how the female as the enclosure of Paradise carries the male. Then the likeness of the Phoenix remains in unchanging beauty but has been affected by its female host, Paradise. In this way, the new Phoenix is both corporeal and

spiritual. It also suggests that, the body might be the result of the merging of the parents but the soul comes from God. This is one of the possibilities of the male and female amalgamation within the poem.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

Throughout this thesis the Phoenix has been analyzed as symbolic of the soul. Its interaction with Paradise is its unification with the female element, which is necessary to acknowledge and adapt through the inward turn that an individual is required to make. The allegory here shares particular imagery with Christ and with Mary, subtly depicting Mary's role as the mother of Christ and linking her to fertility and the Church, as well as poignantly depicting the resurrection of Christ. The old grey Phoenix is then transformed through its own death in a sacrificial manner into a new young Phoenix gaining eternal life and a renewed youth in its flight back to bury the remains of its previous life.

The symbolism within the poem is that of Christianity. However, it has certain links to more traditions of thought, which were more central to secular Anglo-Saxon society such as the *comitatus*, a lord and his thanes. The poet places the Christian symbolism and didactic message, within imagery that convey these secular traditions, in order to make a swift transition of thought from the corporeal to the divine. Access to the poem's underlying message is subtler as it is intricately woven in to familiar concepts and contexts. The result is that the reader associates more closely with the poem, relating it to his life and incorporating the poet's teachings on the gender unification of the soul.

Within *The Phoenix* it is the complexity and multitude of concepts which can be accessed, that make it such a labyrinth of religious and philosophical ideas. The

language reflects this in its repetition of concepts, vocabulary and particular episodes; the poem shifts and alters its meaning and symbolism in a progressive metamorphosis which leads to the more complex message which incorporates all previous sequences. The poem commences with symbolism easily identifiable with biblical figures and events, such as Christ and his resurrection. As it continues it shifts its symbolism to a level of deeper interpretation and fuller allegorical constructions, such as Paradise's link to Mary, and through her, the Church, alongside concepts of nourishment and the abstract female. Through the shift in perspective which occurs through the sequences within the poem discussed above, what appears to be repetition of a specific point is actually reconstructed as opposition to it. The poet forces the audience not only to amalgamate the two contrasting concepts, but also to move to another level of interpretation in understanding the shift. This comes in the form of amalgamating the two into one complete symbolism within in the Phoenix as; the soul, the male, the abstract female, death and life, youth and age. Corporeal and spiritual, tropological, topological and anagogical are all reflected in the inward turn of an individual to God, in whom all things are reflected. The audience receives a biblical account, a warning on events to come, and finally a didactic message through which they are able to understand how the soul can transcend to its divine state.

The Phoenix as the soul still reflects the corporeal side to the Phoenix's life cycle, and particular sections within the poem seem to focus on the realities of physical existence in relation to Anglo-Saxon society. There spiritual enlightenment temporarily clashes with the reminder of bodily endurance in the face of solitude and death. This does not alter or undermine the message of the poem; it simply offers multiple levels on which the audience can access the message. As well as offering transference from a shared

to a private mode of devotion. However, the didactic message within the poem is based upon the spiritual journey and unification of the soul, using the corporeal elements of the poem as a way of again leading the audience to the poem's core. At this the core is a pre-natal unified and androgynous soul, the new Phoenix, which in its existence encapsulates a wholeness of being, linking it to the divine above and the mortal below. The structural elements of the poem, such as the language, the symmetry within descriptions of the two Phoenix and their journeys, and the shift of meaning through the repeated imagery are the same as the underlying symbolism. The human soul is in its nature a single unified entity with no specific gender, simply the abstract attributes of both, through which the soul in its position between the spiritual and corporeal world can identify the divine and move towards God.

The multi-layering of imagery within this poem has caused many critics to find conflicting interpretations. However, in identifying the poem's symbolic message this thesis has demonstrated that, all interpretations of the poem (whether based upon the biblical accounts of Christ or Mary, or upon thanes and burial rights) simply strengthen the poem's didactic imagery. As in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, the poet is simply showing the audience the 'sun', which offers freedom to the soul and entrance into Heaven. The unification of the genders allows for a loss of corporeality and returns the soul in the most explicit of ways back to a pre-creative state.

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